SPECIAL FEATURE NO. 3-1492 APRIL 18, 1978
BAN/LAY

ELLA AT 60
(INSERTS IN TAPE LIBRARY)

ANNCR: "ELLA" AT 60 -- A TRIBUTE TO AMERICAN JAZZ SINGER, ELLA FITZGERALD -- AFFECTIONATELY CALLED BY FANS AND COLLEAGUES "THE FIRST LADY OF SONG" -- IN CELEBRATION OF HER 60TH BIRTHDAY (APRIL 25).

TAPE: CUT ONE -- MUSIC: "A-TISKET, A-TASKET" -- IN FULL BRIEFLY, FADE UNDER:

NARR: ...THE YEAR IS 1938... THE WHOLE UNITED STATES SEEMS TO BE SINGING THIS VARIATION ON A SIMPLE NURSERY RHYME... THE NAME OF THE SINGER -- ELLA FITZGERALD -- SOON BECOMES A HOUSEHOLD WORD... AND PEOPLE BEGIN TO WONDER: WHO IS THIS SKINNY LITTLE GIRL WHO SEEMS TO HAVE TAKEN OVER CHICK WEBB'S PRESTIGIOUS BAND?...

TAPE: CUT TWO -- ELLA

"I REALLY STARTED OUT TO BE A DANCER. AND THAT WAS ON A DARE WITH SOME GIRL-FRIENDS. WE WENT TO THE APOLLO THEATER AND WE MADE A BET, WHERE WE DREW STRAWS, ONE OF THOSE THINGS WHERE YOU SAY, 'I BET YOU WON'T GO ON THE STAGE!' AND WE SIGNED OUR NAMES AND WE NEVER THOUGHT THEY WOULD DRAW OUR NAMES OUT OF THE BOX -- AND MY NAME WAS DRAWN. I LIVED DOWN IN YONKERS, NEW YORK, AND I HAD TO GO DOWN THERE, OTHERWISE I WOULD'VE BEEN CALLED 'CHICKEN.' SO, I WENT DOWN THERE AND I WAS THE FIRST ONE THAT THEY CALLED ON THE STAGE. YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE, THIS WAS SO FUNNY, BECAUSE I WAS A REAL SKINNY KID, AND SOMEBODY HOLLERED, 'WHAT IS SHE GONNA DO?' AND I WAS SUPPOSED TO DANCE. BUT THEY HAD TWO SISTERS, CALLED THE EDWARD SISTERS, AND THEY WERE SOME DANCERS. BOY, THEY CLOSED THE SHOW THERE! AND IT WAS NO WAY IN THE WORLD FOR ME TO GO AND TRY TO DO MY DANCE AFTER THEM. SO, THE MAN SAID, 'YOU ARE OUT HERE, TRY AND DO SOMETHING!' SO, I TRIED TO SING. WE HAD A RECORD AT HOME OF MISS CONNIE BOSWELL'S CALLED 'JUDY.' SO, I SANG 'JUDY' AND TRIED TO SOUND LIKE HER, AND EVERYBODY SAID I HAVE A VOICE! AND THEN, AFTER I SANG 'JUDY,' THEY WANTED ME TO SING MORE, SO I SANG THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RECORD, 'OBJECT OF MY AFFECTION.' AND THAT'S HOW I WON THE FIRT PRIZE!"

NARR: ...THE FIRST PRIZE WAS TEN DOLLARS -- A TREMENDOUS SUM FOR A 16YEAR-OLD SCHOOL-GIRL IN THOSE DAYS... BUT THAT WAS NOT ALL: OUT IN THE HALL, IN THE AUDIENCE, WAS THE MAN WHO WOULD SHAPE HER WHOLE FUTURE... FAMED DRUMMER AND BANDLEADER CHICK WEBB -- THE KING OF THE SAVOY BALLROOM IN HARLEM...

WEBB HAD BEEN ABOUT TO LEAVE WHEN THIS FRIGHTENED LITTLE TEENAGER MOVED HESITANTLY TO THE MICROPHONE AND SANG WITH SUCH NATURAL EASE THAT CHICK HAD TO STOP AND LISTEN. HE HAD BEEN LOOKING FOR A WAY TO REVITALIZE HIS BAND AND HE SUDDENLY REALIZED THAT HERE WAS THE TALENT HE HAD BEEN LOOKING FOR. HE FOUND OUT THAT ELLA WAS AN ORPHAN FROM NEWPORT NEWS, VIRGINIA, WHO HAD BEEN BROUGHT UP BY AN AUNT IN YONKERS, NEW YORK. HE TOOK THE GIRL TO HIS OWN HOME, TO LIVE WITH HIM AND HIS WIFE, CLOTHED HER, GUIDED AND TRAINED HER -- IN SHORT, CHICK WEBB BECAME A REPLACEMENT FOR THE FATHER WHOM SHE HAD LOST SO EARLY IN LIFE...

TAPE: CUT THREE -- ELLA

"I HAD A GOOD TEACHER IN THE LATE CHICK WEBB. HE ALWAYS TOLD ME: 'NEVER WANT TO BE SOMEONE THAT COMES UP IN A HURRY -- 'CAUSE YOU'LL GO DOWN IN A HURRY!'"

NARR: CHICK WEBB'S INVESTMENT IN ELLA FITZGERALD PROVED MUTUALLY REWARDING: ELLA'S SINGING WITH THE WEBB BAND WAS LARGELY RESPONSIBLE FOR ITS NEW SUCCESS, AND ELLA GOT AN EDUCATION SHE COULD HARDLY HAVE GAINED ANYWHERE ELSE. WITHIN A SHORT TIME, SHE MET AND WORKED WITH THE GREATEST FIGURES IN THE WORLD OF JAZZ. ... THEN THE REAL BREAKTHROUGH, WHICH CAME IN 1938 -- ONLY FOUR YEARS AFTER THAT AMATEUR NIGHT AT THE APOLLO THEATER:

TAPE: CUT FOUR -- MUSIC: "A-TISKET, A-TASKET" -- AS DESIRED AND HOLD UNDER:

NARR: ELLA FITZGERALD HAD RECORDED HER FIRST HIT!

TAPE: MUSIC: UP FULL AND FADE UNDER

NARR: ... FOLLOWING THE SUCCESS OF "A-TISKET, A-TASKET," CHICK WEBB AND HIS ORCHESTRA -- WITH ELLA FITZGERALD AS ITS STAR -- ENJOYED AN UNPRECEDENTED WAVE OF SUCCESS... THEN, TRAGEDY STRUCK: AFTER SEVERAL MONTHS OF PAIN FROM TUBERCULOSIS OF THE SPINE, CHICK WEBB DIED. IT WAS A PERSONAL TRAGEDY FOR ELLA -- BUT LIFE HAD TO GO ON... SHE TOOK OVER THE DIRECTION OF THE BAND... WHICH WAS RENAMED ELLA FITZGERALD AND HER FAMOUS ORCHESTRA...

TAPE: CUT FIVE -- MUSIC: "STAIRWAY TO THE STARS" -- IN FULL TO THE END OF THE FIRST CHORUS, FADE UNDER.

NARR: ...THESE WERE TURBULENT TIMES FOR ELLA... BARELY 20, SHE EMBARKED ON A SHORT-LIVED MARRIAGE, BUT THE COMBINATION OF MARRIAGE AND BAND-LEADING BECAME TO GREAT A STRAIN. IN 1942, THE BAND WAS DISSOLVED, IN 1943, THE MARRIAGE.. FOR THE NEXT FEW YEARS, ELLA PERFORMED WITH LOUIS ARMSTRONG, THE DELTA RHYTHM BOYS, EDDIE HEYWOOD, BENNY GOODMAN, DUKE ELLINGTON -- ALMOST EVERY GREAT BAND IN THIS COUNTRY...

1949 WAS A TURNING POINT IN ELLA'S PERSONAL LIFE: SHE MARRIED BASSIST RAY BROWN. BROWN, AN EX-BASSIST WITH DIZZIE GILLESPIE'S BAND, FORMED HIS OWN TRIO -- TO ACCOMPANY ELLA. DURING THE FIFTIES, BOTH OF THEM WERE PART OF THE SENSATIONAL CONCERT AND RECORDING SERIES "JAZZ AT THE PHILHARMONIC."

TAPE: CUT SIX -- MUSIC: "HIGH HIGH THE MOON" -- IN FULL TO THE END OF THE FIRST CHORUS, THEN FADE UNDER.

NARR: THE FIRST CONCERT OF THE SERIES WAS PRESENTED AT THE PHILHARMONIC AUDITORIUM IN LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA. IT WAS SO SUCCESSFUL THAT IT BECAME THE FIRST OF A MONTHLY SERIES. EVENTUALLY, "JAZZ AT THE PHILHARMONIC" WENT ABROAD... ELLA FITZGERALD SANG FOR NEW AUDIENCES -- AUDIENCES WHICH WERE AS ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT HER SINGING AS THOSE AT HOME... BUT IT WAS BY SHEER ACCIDENT -- WHEN SHE WAS ASKED TO SING A VERY POPULAR SONG OF THE TIME, WHOSE LYRICS SHE DIDN'T KNOW -- THAT SHE SCORED HER BIGGEST HIT IN EUROPE...

TAPE: CUT SEVEN -- ELLA

"AT THAT TIME 'MACK THE KNIFE' WAS THE NUMBER ONE HIT LOUIS ARMSTRONG HAD MADE A BIG HIT OF IT AND THE MOMENT WE WENT INTO IT -- IN FACT, I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW IT, AND THE WAY WE DID IT WAS SOMETHING THAT WE WERE JUST DOING IMPROMPTU... WE WERE TRYING TO REMEMBER THE LYRICS BECAUSE I'D NEVER REALLY SUNG IT AND WE JUST KEPT ON GOING AND ADDING WHATEVER CAME IN OUR MINDS AND WHATEVER CAME OUT THAT WAS IT AND IT WAS A BIG HIT FOR US -- ONE OF THE BIGGEST HITS -- AND IN FACT WE STILL DO IT NOW."

TAPE: CUT EIGHT -- "MACK THE KNIFE" USE APPROPRIATE SECTION WITH IMPROVISED LYRICS

NARR: ... WITH THE RAISED SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE SIXTIES, WHEN MANY ENTERTAINERS BECAME INVOLVED IN COMMUNITY AFFAIRS, ELLA FITZGERALD WAS ALSO THERE. SHE BECAME A REGULAR ATTRACTION AT THE ANNUAL JAZZ FESTIVALS AT LORTON REFORMATORY IN VIRGINIA AND AT OTHER CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS. AND, SHE BECAME DEEPLY INVOLVED WITH MENTALLY RETARDED CHILDREN...

IN 1968 ELLA FITZGERALD ACCEPTED THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE NEWLY-FORMED MARTIN LUTHER KING FOUNDATION, WHOSE AIM WAS

NARR: (CONT'D) TO ESTABLISH EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS IN THE FIELD OF RACE RELATIONS. / TO MARK THE OCCASION, SHE MADE A SINGLE RECORD, DEDICATED IT TO DR. KING, AND DONATED THE ROYALTIES TO THE FOUNDATION...

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TAPE: CUT NINE -- "IT'S UP TO YOU AND ME" -- AS DESIRED. /

NARR: ... DURING HER NEARLY FOUR DECADES IN THE LIMELIGHT, ELLA HAD HER SHARE OF PERSONAL TRAGEDY AND PERIODS OF PHYSICAL EXHAUSTION. HER EYES BECAME A CONSTANT CAUSE FOR CONCERN: DESPITE MANY PAINFUL OPERATIONS, HER EYESIGHT IS FAILING... BUT HER SON, HER FAITH IN GOD AND PEOPLE HAVE ALWAYS GIVEN HER THE STRENGHT TO CONTINUE.

ON STAGE, SHE FOLLOWED THE MUSICAL TRENDS OF THE TIME. SHE SANG SOME BEATLES' SONGS AND THE MOTOWN SOUNDS WHEN THEY CAME INTO FASHION. "THE NEW SOUNDS," SHE SAID, "ARE NOT ALL BAD."

TAPE: CUT TEN -- ELLA

"I DON'T PUT DOWN ANY KIND OF MUSIC. I THINK ROCK AND ROLL, WELL, IT'S LIKE YOU MIGHT SAY THERE WERE SONGS WRITTEN WHEN I WAS SINGING, WHEN I FIRST CAME UP, THERE WERE GOOD SONGS AND THERE WERE BAD SONGS BUT IT DIDN'T STAY, THE TREND CHANGED AND IT'S THE SAME THING NOW. AS THE KIDS GO ALONG, THEY'RE WRITING BETTER MUSIC, SOME OF THE SONGS ARE JUST BEAUTIFUL. I JUST LOVE THEM."

NARR: ON RECORDS, ELLA PRODUCED A SERIES OF OUTSTANDING SONG BOOK ALBUMS OF THE MUSIC OF GEORGE AND IRA GERSHWIN, IRVING BERLIN, ROGERS AND HART, DUKE ELLINGTON AND COLE PORTER.

TAPE: CUT ELEVEN "JUST ONE OF THOSE THINGS"

NARR: THROUGH THE UPS AND DOWNS OF THE PAST FOUR DECADES AND THE CONTINUED ADULATION OF HER AUDIENCE, ELLA FITZGERALD HAS REMAINED A VERY PRIVATE PERSON, WITH A TASTE FOR THE SIMPLE THINGS IN LIFE...

TAPE: CUT TWELVE -- ELLA

"I LIKE TO STAY HOME AND RAMBLE. I LIKE TO DECORATE. I LIKE TO DO THINGS AROUND THE HOUSE. THAT'S ONE OF THE THINGS I LIKE TO DO. MY BAGS ARE ALWAYS FULL OF RECIPES AND DECORATING THINGS FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES. THE KIDS, THEY LIKE HAMBURGERS SO MUCH THAT THERE IS REALLY NOT MUCH CHANCE TO EXPERIMENT. AND SOMETIMES I HAVE TO THROW THEM AWAY, BECAUSE I DON'T HAVE ANYWHERE TO PUT THEM!"

NARR: ...BUT EVEN NOW WHEN SHE APPEARS ON THE STAGE, HER OLD DREAM OF BECOMING A DANCER RETURNS...

TAPE: CUT THIRTEEN -- (MUSIC SNEAKS UNDER "THAT OLD BLACK MAGIC")

NARR: AS SHE STANDS THERE IN THE GLARE OF THE LIGHTS, THE FINGERS OF ONE HAND SNAPPING, HER HEAD TURNED TO THE SIDE, HER EYES CLOSED, HER OTHER HAND WAVING THE INEVITABLE COLORFUL SCARF, HER BODY MOVES RHYTHMICALLY FROM SIDE TO SIDE, WHILE HER VOICE SOARS ABOVE THE AUDIENCE WITH THE BEAUTIFUL SOUND OF LIVING MUSIC...

TAPE: MUSIC UP FULL AND FADE OUT:

BML/YRV